

VZCZCXYZ0005
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHFR #1799/01 1271703
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 071703Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6973

UNCLAS PARIS 001799

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [SCUL](#) [SMIG](#) [SOCI](#) [FR](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR SPECIAL ENVOY FOR COMBATING
ANTI-SEMITISM RICKMAN

¶1. (U) SUMMARY.: Government and NGO sources report an overall increase in anti-Semitic incidents in 2006, with a much sharper increase in physical attacks on persons. More recently, March and April witnessed a spate of anti-Semitic crimes including cemetery profanations and physical attacks. Public authorities including at the highest levels have reacted swiftly to address anti-Semitic crimes, making strenuous efforts to apprehend guilty parties and to support victims. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) The U.S Embassy in Paris welcomes DRL/Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism (SEAS) Gregg Rickman and Deputy Director Lisa Sherman. This cable provides an overview of France's Jewish population and of anti-Semitism in France.

DEMOGRAPHICS

¶3. (U) There are about 600,000 Jews living in France, just under one percent of the total population. France has the third largest Jewish community in the world, behind that of Israel and the United States. About 375,000 Jews reside in the Paris metropolitan region. French Jews are mostly of North African origin and, according to press reports, at least 60 percent are not highly observant, celebrating at most the High Holy Days. The large majority of observant Jews are Orthodox, with a small number of Conservative and Reform congregations.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

¶4. (U) By the early 1900s, improved conditions for Jews in France helped to prompt a wave of Jewish immigration largely from Eastern Europe. Jews became leading contributors to French art and culture during this time. France in the 1930s elected its first Jewish Prime Minister, Leon Blum. During the WWII occupation of France by Germany, the collaborationist Vichy Government established the Commissariat General aux Questions Juives (the General Commissariat for Jewish Questions), which worked with the Gestapo to deport 76,000 French Jews to the concentration camps. In total, a quarter of France's Jewish population of 300,000 was murdered during the Holocaust. Many survivors resettled in France after the war.

¶5. (U) In the decades after WWII, many Jews (often already French citizens) migrated from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia to metropolitan France. (Arab nationalism in the former colonies along with tension deriving from the Arab-Israeli conflict had triggered a resurgence of anti-Semitism in those countries.) France was a strong supporter of Israel in the years following Israeli independence, voting for recognition of Israel at the UN and providing military and technical support. After the Six-Day War, France adopted its "politique Arab," a pro-Arab orientation that has endured until this day. Over the last two years, France has attempted to improve its relations with Israel without

alienating its Arab friends.

ANTI-SEMITISM: STATISTICS

¶6. (U) The National Consultative Commission for Human Rights (CNCDH), in conjunction with the Ministry of the Interior, reported in March 2007 that 2006 witnessed a slight increase in anti-Semitic acts) 541 in 2006, a six percent increase from the 508 reported events in 2005. (2004 remains the worst year in the last decade, with 974 reported anti-Semitic incidents.) A larger proportion of 2006 anti-Semitic acts were violent) 134 over against 99 in 2005 (a 35 percent increase). In a parallel study, the Service for the Protection of the Jewish Community announced on February 26, 2007 that 2006 witnessed larger increases in reported anti-Semitic activity in France, with 213 anti-Semitic acts (up 40 percent from 134 in 2005) and 158 anti-Semitic threats or insults (up seven percent from 148 in 2005) for a total of 371 episodes (up 24 percent from 2005). These statistics indicate a net increase in anti-Semitic episodes for the months following the murder of Ilan Halimi by young thugs in February and the Israel-Hezbollah War during the summer. The Representative Council of Jewish Organizations (CRIF) said in a subsequent communique that "the essential and most worrying aspect (of the report)" lies in a "45-per cent increase in physical attacks" on people. Recorded incidents returned to lower levels during the final months of 2006, a trend that continued into early 2007.

RECENT NOTEWORTHY ANTI-SEMITIC ATTACKS

¶7. (U) March and April 2007 witnessed a spate of well-publicized anti-Semitic incidents:
--On March 1 in a radio interview former Prime Minister Raymond Barre appeared to justify the collaboration of Vichy-era French government officials with the Nazi

occupiers' deportation of French Jews and defended right-wing extremist Bruno Gollnisch's right to voice opinions that falsify the magnitude of Nazi killing of Jews. French anti-racism NGO, SOS Racism, demanded that legal action be taken against Barre.

-- On March 20, the Global News Service for the Jewish People (JTA) reported that more than 7,000 French Jews signed a petition asking for political asylum in the United States because of anti-Semitism in France. News of the petition was met with outrage by most Jewish community spokespersons. "This petition is bizarre, stupid and out of place," said CRIF Director Hiam Musicant, in an interview with Israel's Ma'ariv newspaper. "I don't feel threatened in France, and the authorities are doing everything they can to protect the Jewish community. French Jews don't need this kind of petition."

--In late March a Nice-area daily published an article detailing the continued existence of Vichy-era legal prohibitions on renting or selling property to Jews. According to Martine Ouaknine, former Nice-Cote d'Azur CRIF regional president, it was regrettable that the discriminatory co-ownership settlements were still found in older contractual agreements because of the painful memories they evoked; however, she explained that the measures themselves became null and void immediately after the war and have not been applied to discriminate against Jewish property owners since that time.

--Also in late March, vandals desecrated fifty-one Jewish Tombs in a Lille cemetery, prompting widespread condemnation and a large-scale police investigation into what one government prosecutor called "the largest event of this sort ever to happen in the region." The vandalism elicited a solidarity march in the cemetery attended by a thousand people.

--On April 19, Lille Rabbi Elie Dahan, who presided over a well-attended commemoration ceremony at the cemetery following the Jewish tombs' desecration and who had been an active spokesman for the Jewish community during the subsequent police investigation, was verbally and physically assaulted in Paris.

--On April 21, vandals damaged 180 graves, a quarter of which

were Jewish, in the main Le Havre cemetery of Saint-Marie.
-- On April 30, state prosecutors opened an official investigation for armed robbery and violence by a group for racist motives after an April 26 attack against a 22-year old Jewish student in a Marseille metro station parking area. According to the victim, two men physically assaulted her, including slashing her tee-shirt with a knife and inscribing a swastika on her torso before fleeing with her purse and cell phone. The attack has since received surprisingly little national media attention in comparison with coverage of other anti-Semitic crimes.

JEWISH EMIGRATION

18. (U) According to the Director of the Jewish Agency for Israel (JA), Jewish emigration from France to Israel (the only emigration for which statistics are readily available), declined in 2006, down to 2,900 from 3,500 in 2005 but up somewhat from preceding years (2,483 in 2004 and 2,080 in 2003). This year, for the same period, the JA notes a 10 percent increase in requests. According to press reports, about 76,000 Jews emigrated from France to Israel between 1948 and mid-2005. According to the JA Director, Jewish emigrants from France to other countries are far less numerous, numbering "in the dozens" only. The JA has no record of how many French Jews may return to France. While we have no way of measuring emigration of French Jews to the U.S. and Canada, there has been over the years a small but steady flow of French Jews to such magnet cities as Los Angeles, Miami and Montreal. Note: The JA's information contradicts March 11, 2007 Miami Herald reporting that French Jews are leaving in the thousands and relocating in South Florida and other U.S. cities.

THE CHANGING FACE OF ANTI-SEMITISM: JEWISH RESPONSES

19. (SBU) As the reporting bears out, anti-Semitism exists in France, but other considerations make assessing its true dimensions difficult. French Jews are part of a society with an open and extensive media environment in which every reported act of anti-Semitism receives ample media treatment.

A traditional anti-Semitism of the kind explicitly represented by Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front Party and implicitly by Raymond Barre's comments has receded but not disappeared. A new anti-Israeli form of anti-Semitism, to which some immigrants of Muslim (black and Arab) background are particularly susceptible, appears to be the generator of most anti-Semitic incidents. That said, there is much debate about the extent to which French Jews, in their daily lives, experience anti-Semitism. Much appears to depend on the life situation of each individual, his/her assimilation into the larger French community, and, most important, socio-economic

factors. For poorer Jews, especially in some low-income, mixed Muslim-Jewish suburbs (usually outnumbered significantly by Muslim residents), there is a generalized sense of vulnerability, to which a perception of anti-Semitism is a contributing factor. Unsurprisingly, the fact that there is a readily available alternative * Israel * means that a certain percentage will decide to join family and start a new life, or send some family members, or at least buy property. Others have the same option * or seek the same option * in the U.S.

10. (SBU) Anti-Semitism is for some a * or even the * factor contributing to a decision to emigrate. For others, it is one consideration among many, including the classic motivation for emigration, particularly to the U.S. * to improve one's lot and to offer a better future to the next generation * a rationale that also applies to the 350,000 French men and women who have left for the U.K. French Jews, particularly those from North Africa who have preserved a strong Jewish identity and have themselves been in France only for two generations, may also be psychologically better able to make the leap of imagining themselves leaving the country and becoming Israelis or Americans. In short, the national crisis of self-confidence and malaise that France has experienced in recent years, along with a sluggish

economy and high unemployment, could also explain at least part of ongoing emigration of Jews from France.

GOVERNMENT ACTION AGAINST ANTI-SEMITISM

¶11. (U) Senior government officials up to and including President Chirac have strongly denounced anti-Semitism. The annual CRIF dinner guest list reads like a political "Who's Who" of France. Last year, the 800 attendees included Nicolas Sarkozy, Dominique de Villepin, Michele Alliot-Marie, Philippe Douste-Blazy, Francois Hollande and Dominique Strauss-Kahn. Throughout his term as Interior Minister, president-elect Nicolas Sarkozy took an active public role in denouncing and combating anti-Semitism wherever he encountered it, including personally overseeing the dismantlement last year of the web site operated by the anti-Semitic group, "Tribe K."

¶12. (U) Following Ilan Halimi's murder in February 2006, Prime Minister de Villepin highlighted recent and planned government efforts to combat anti-Semitism in an address to CRIF representatives. These efforts included:

- Expedited processing ("comparution immediate") for those committing anti-Semitic crimes.
- Guaranteed prosecution and more severe punishments for perpetrators of anti-Semitic crimes, both involving physical aggression and involving damage to property.
- Provisions introduced in January 2006 empowering the French Broadcasting Authority (CSA) to refuse to license a channel carrying anti-Semitic messages (as in the case of al-Manar).
- Better communication between government authorities and religious communities, including improved cooperation between the police and volunteers from the Jewish Community Protection Service.
- Expanded training of the judiciary at the Legal Service Training College to include better preparation on anti-Semitism issues.
- A planned Ministry of Education anti-Semitism reference package for teachers and school heads.
- An updated Ministry of Justice cyber-crime guide that will include specific instructions for combating anti-Semitic propaganda.
- The development of video surveillance in areas around the most sensitive buildings, particularly schools and places of worship.
- Plans to establish an Internet contact point for reporting anti-Semitic or racist messages on the Internet.

¶13. (U) The upshot is that the reality of anti-Semitism in France is complex and elusive. The variety of perspectives you will hear during your visit will provide you with the raw material to refine your own assessments. We look forward to your visit and the opportunity it provides us to learn more about anti-Semitism in France. Please visit Paris' Classified Website at:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

STAPLETON